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ABSTRACT

British poet Edward Lear (1812-1888) is widely recognized as the father of the limerick form of poetry and is well known for his nonsense poems. In the first lesson for grades 3-5, which focuses on Lear's nonsense poem "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," students learn about nonsense poetry as well as the various poetic techniques and devices that poets use to help their readers create a mental picture while reading or hearing poems. In the second lesson, "Edward Lear, Limericks, and Nonsense: There Once Was...," students learn the form of the limerick poem, practice finding the meter and rhyme schemes in various Lear limericks, and write their own limericks. These lesson plans: provide an introduction; cite subject areas, time required, and skills developed; pose guiding questions; give learning objectives; inform teachers about preparing to teach the lesson; outline suggested activities; list selected Websites; and address standards alignment. (NKA)

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CS 512 083

Edward Lear, Limericks, and Nonsense: A Little Nonsense

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
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GRADES 3-5

Introduction

British poet Edward Lear (1812-1888) is widely recognized as the father of the limerick form of poetry and is well known for his nonsense poems. In this lesson, which focuses on Lear's nonsense poem "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," students learn about nonsense poetry as well as the various poetic techniques and devices that poets use to help their readers create a mental picture while reading or hearing poems.

In a related lesson, Edward Lear, Limericks, and Nonsense: There Once Was..., students learn the form of the limerick poem, practice finding the meter and rhyme schemes in various Lear limericks, and write their own limericks.

The Owl and The Pussycat
Courtesy of the Edward Lear Home Page

Guiding Questions:

Who was Edward Lear and what types of poems did he write? What poetic devices and figures of speech are characteristic of nonsense poems?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Recognize poetic devices, including rhyme, syllabification, and meter.
- Recognize figures of speech, including alliteration, onomatopoeia, and personification
- Comprehend the characteristics of a nonsense poem.
- Write their own nonsense poems.

Preparing to Teach this Lesson

- Review the lesson plan. Locate and bookmark suggested materials and other useful websites. Download and print out selected documents and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
- Review the following background information about Edward Lear, his work, and nonsense verse:

  Edward Lear (1812-1888) was an English landscape painter who became widely known for writing nonsense verse and popularizing limericks. He remained, however, primarily an artist and earned his living by drawing. Between 1832 and 1837, Lear came under the patronage of the Earl of Derby while creating illustrations of the Earl's private menagerie. He subsequently produced *A Book of Nonsense*, which is full of limericks and illustrations, for the Earl's grandchildren in 1846. (Sources: Drabble, Margaret and Stringer, Jenny. *The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature*. Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990. *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1995.)

  For more information about Lear's life, see the Edward Lear Chronology, available via a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library.

Subject Areas
Literature and Language Arts
Poetry

Time Required
Two 45-minute classes

Skills
Reading and analyzing poetry
Identifying and analyzing rhythm and meter
Developing listening skills
Illustrating a concept or idea
Comparing poetic forms
Recognizing poetic devices
Distinguishing between poetic techniques and devices
Writing poetry

Additional Data
Date Created: 07/12/02

The 1861 version of A Book of Nonsense is available on the Edward Lear Home Page, another link from Internet Public Library. (NOTE: Lear's work is in the public domain.) Select a few limericks and illustrations to print out and make copies for the students. Alternately, you can use a projection device to display poems for the class. Recommended poems include:
    - The Owl and the Pussy Cat The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker and the Tongs
- Nonsense verse is humorous or whimsical verse that contains absurd characters and actions. Frequently, it also contains *nonce* words, which are evocative but essentially meaningless. (Source: *Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature*. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1995.) A nonce word is a word that is created for an instance or occasion. An example of a poem containing nonce words is Lewis Carroll's "Jabberwocky." In this instance, some of the nonce words are portmanteau words, meaning they are words formed by blending distinct words into new words. For example, "slithy" is Carroll's combination of "slimy" and "lithe." The nonce words in nonsense poetry always sound purposeful.

Suggested Activities

Download, copy, and distribute to students the Edward Lear nonsense poem The Owl and the Pussy Cat, available via a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library. Or, post it for class viewing using a projection device.

Ask the class to comment on the illustration(s). Read the poem aloud to the students, emphasizing the sing-song quality of the stanzas.

Introduce students to each of the following poetic devices:

- Stanza: A group of lines in a poem considered as a unit. Stanzas often function like paragraphs in prose. Each stanza states and develops a single main idea.
- Couplet: Two consecutive lines of poetry that work together.
- Alliteration: The use of words with the same or similar beginning sounds, e.g., Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers.
- Onomatopoeia: The use of words that imitate sounds, e.g., ding dong, boom, swish, gulp, etc.
- Personification: A literary technique in which an author assigns human characteristics to inanimate things or abstract ideas.

As a class, identify examples of each technique in the poem.

After the class has identified the literary devices in the first poem, have students form groups to identify the devices in The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker and the Tongs, also available via a link from the EDSITEment resource Internet Public Library.

You may wish to divide the class into two teams and create a game of the activity. See which team can find an example of each poetic device first and keep score. You can repeat this game with many other nonsense poems that are available at Edward Lear, Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets, accessible through the EDSITEment resource Internet Public Library. Try any of the following:

- "The Duck and the Kangaroo"
- "The Daddy Long-Legs and the Fly"
- "The Jumblies"
- "The Nutcrackers and the Sugar-Tongs"
- "Calico Pie"
- "Mr. and Mrs. Spikky Sparrow"
- "The Table and the Chair"

In groups or individually, have students prepare their own poems using some of the poetic devices

learned in this lesson. You may wish to have them create their own alphabet poems modeled after Lear's. Divide the class into groups and assign a block of letters to each group. Have the students compose alliterative poems that include personification for each of their letters. They can also choose to illustrate their poems. Compile a class book and make a copy for each student, or display all of the poems (in alphabetical order) along a bulletin board or wall.

Selected EDSITEment Websites

- The Academy of American Poets [http://www.poets.org/]
  - Edward Lear [http://www.poets.org/poets/poets.cfm?prmID=141]
- Internet Public Library [http://www.ipl.org/]
  - IPL Youth Collection: Reading Zone Poetry and Rhymes [http://www.ipl.org/cgi-bin/youth/youth.out.pl?sub=rzn4000]
  - Edward Lear Home Page [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/]
  - Edward Lear, A Book of Nonsense [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/BoN/index.html]
  - Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense 1-10 [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/BoN/bon010.html]
  - Edward Lear Chronology [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/learbio.html]
  - Edward Lear's Nonsense Works [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/learwk.html]
  - Edward Lear, Nonsense Songs, Stories, Botany and Alphabets [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/ns/index.html]
  - The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker and the Tongs [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/ns/broom.html]
  - The Owl and the Pussy Cat [http://edwardlear.tripod.com/ns/pussy.html]

Other Information

Standards Alignment

1. NCTE/IRA-1

   Students read a wide range of print and nonprint texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States and the world; to acquire new information; to respond to the needs and demands of society and the workplace; and for personal fulfillment. Among these texts are fiction and nonfiction, classic and contemporary works. more

2. NCTE/IRA-2

   Students read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience. more

3. NCTE/IRA-3

   Students adjust their use of spoken, written, and visual language (e.g., conventions, style, vocabulary) to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences and for different purposes. more

4. NCTE/IRA-8

   Students use a variety of technological and information resources (e.g., libraries, databases,

computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge. more

Edward Lear, Limericks, and Nonsense: There Once Was...

NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES
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GRADES 3-5

The Owl and The Pussycat
Courtesy of the Edward Lear Home Page

Subject Areas
Literature and Language Arts
Poetry

Time Required
Two 45-minute classes

Skills
Reading and analyzing poetry
Identifying and analyzing rhythm and meter
Developing listening skills
Illustrating a concept or idea
Comparing poetic forms
Recognizing poetic devices
Distinguishing between poetic techniques and devices
Writing poetry

Additional Data
Date Created: 06/28/02

Introduction

British poet Edward Lear (1812-1888) is most widely recognized as the father of the limerick form of poetry and is well known for his nonsense poems. In this lesson, students will learn the form of the limerick poem, practice finding the meter and rhyme schemes in various Lear limericks, and write their own limericks.

In a related lesson, Edward Lear, Limericks, and Nonsense: A Little Nonsense, which focuses on Lear's nonsense poem "The Owl and the Pussy Cat," students learn about nonsense poetry as well as the various poetic techniques and devices that poets use to help their readers create a mental picture while reading or hearing poems.

Guiding Questions:

Who was Edward Lear and what types of poems did he write? What are the characteristics of a limerick?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Recognize poetic devices including rhyme, syllabification, and meter
- Identify the characteristics of a nonsense poem and of a limerick
- Write their own limericks

Preparing to Teach this Lesson

- Review the lesson plan. Locate and bookmark suggested materials and other useful websites. Download and print out selected documents and duplicate copies as necessary for student viewing.
- Review the following background information about Edward Lear, his work, and the limerick poem:

  Edward Lear (1812-1888) was an English landscape painter who became widely known for writing nonsense verse and popularizing limericks. He remained, however, primarily an artist and earned his living by drawing. Between 1832 and 1837, Lear came under the patronage of the Earl of Derby while creating illustrations of the Earl's private menagerie. He subsequently produced A Book of Nonsense, which is full of limericks and illustrations, for the Earl's grandchildren in 1846. (Sources: Drabble, Margaret and Stringer, Jenny. The Concise Oxford Companion to English Literature. Oxford, N.Y.: Oxford University Press, 1990. Merriam Webster's Encyclopedia of Literature. Springfield, Mass.: Merriam-Webster, Inc., 1995.)

  For more information about Lear's life, see the Edward Lear Chronology, available via a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library.

  The 1861 version of A Book of Nonsense is available on the Edward Lear Home Page, another link from Internet Public Library. (NOTE: Lear's work is in the public domain.) Select a few limericks

and illustrations to print out and make copies for the students. Alternately, you can use a projection device to display poems for the class. Recommended poems include:

- The Owl and the Pussy Cat
- The Broom, the Shovel, the Poker and the Tongs

- Review the definition of a limerick as a five-line poem with one couplet (a two-line, rhymed poem) contained inside one triplet (a three-line, rhymed poem). The rhyme pattern is A, A, B, B, A, with lines 1, 2 and 5 forming the triplet, and lines 3 and 4 forming the couplet. Each line of the triplet has three beats, while each line of the couplet has two.

Suggested Activities

Download, copy, and distribute to students the Edward Lear limericks that you have selected from A Book of Nonsense on the Edward Lear Home Page, a link from the EDSITEment-reviewed website Internet Public Library. Or, post the first limerick that you have selected on a projection device for student viewing. You might want to start with "Old Man with a Beard," the first limerick on Edward Lear, Book of Nonsense 1-10:

There was an Old Man with a beard,
Who said, 'It is just as I feared!
Two Owls and a Hen,
Four Larks and a Wren,
Have all built their nests in my beard!'

Ask the class to comment on the illustration(s). If you are using "Old Man with a Beard," ask students to explain why the picture is unrealistic and absurd.

Explain to the class that this type of poem is called nonsense verse, which is humorous or whimsical verse that contains absurd characters and actions. It is meant to be fun.

Have a student volunteer read the poem aloud. Tell the students that this kind of nonsense poem is called a limerick. Ask the students which lines rhyme (1,2 and 5; 3 and 4). Now display another poem of your choosing, or have students turn to the next poem in their handout. Read it aloud, or have a volunteer read it aloud. Again, ask the students which lines rhyme (1,2 and 5; 3 and 4). Continue in this way until students see that all limericks have the same rhyme scheme.

Select another limerick. Divide the class into pairs. Have students clap their hands to count out the meter. Assign one student the task of clapping to your voice as you read the poem aloud and the other student the task of counting the claps. Students should clap when you emphasize a word.

Ask the students how many claps were in each line (lines 1, 2 and 5: 3 claps; lines 3 and 4: 2 claps).

The student pairs can switch jobs and try this exercise with a few poems. They can read them to each other or follow along as you read.

After you have worked through a number of poems, ask students what they noticed about the lines of the limericks. They should have found that all of the limericks had the same number of claps.

Explain that these claps are the meter of the poem. Define meter as the pattern of poetry.

Have students complete the same exercise to find the syllables in the limericks. Lines 1, 2, and 5 each have eight or nine syllables, and lines 3 and 4 each have five syllables. Have students write limericks of their own. Review the features of a limerick:

- Limericks are nonsense verse.

- They have five lines.
- They have a rhyme scheme of A, A, B, B, A (lines 1,2, and 5 rhyme; lines 3 and 4 rhyme).
- The meter is 3, 3, 2, 2, 3.
- The syllabification is 8, 8, 5, 5, 8.

As a class, complete the following limerick:

There was a young lady named Sue,
Who could not locate her left _____;
On one foot she _____.
She had to be _____.
Her right foot became black and _____.

Have students fill in the blanks (shoe, hopped, stopped, blue). For more practice, you can create a limerick as a class, or use a Lear limerick and leave some empty spaces for students to fill in, as above.

Now have students write their own limericks starting with the line, "There once was..." Remind them of the rhyme scheme, meter, and syllabification requirements for a limerick. Students can illustrate their limericks when they are finished. The students' work can be bound into a "Class Book of Nonsense" and distributed to all students, or you can hang up all of the limericks and illustrations on the bulletin board.

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